

Motivation and Social Structure in The Study of Acculturation: A Hungarian Case

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Although immigration has been a central aspect of American life, only in the past thirty years have social scientists paid systematic attention to this problem. Especially as a result of the post-World War II refugee immigration and the territorial settlements following the peace treaties with their large population exchanges, the problems connected with the acculturation of immigrants have received the attention of governmental administrators and social scientists. Traditional questions of culture contact and assimilation have received new research impetus with the Westernization and industrialization of the underdeveloped nations.

The present study has both methodological and substantive objectives. The methodological objective concerns itself with developing operational measures of acculturation. The main research objective is to demonstrate the relationship between acculturation and position in the social structure.

Over the years, a considerable amount of research has been done on assimilation. In the main, however, past research is subject to the following criticisms: a) Only rarely is the concept of acculturation clearly defined. While terms like "assimilation," "accommodation," "absorption," and "cultural integration" refer to a common phenomenon, few attempts at operational definition have been made.¹ b) Most studies of acculturation have been carried out within the confines of a given geographical area in which the ethnic group under study happened to be concentrated. Consequently, the sample selected for research tended to consist mainly of people who in effect, had failed to assimilate. The more successfully acculturated tend to move out of the community, lose most indications of their membership in the given ethnic group and, as a result, are rarely included in acculturation studies. c) Most studies, not focusing on individual differ-

ences, have failed to take into account the differences among individual immigrants in the amount of time spent in the United States. d) Furthermore, little or no attention has been paid to psychological factors facilitating or impeding the process of acculturation.

The present research, therefore, is an attempt to study some of the factors that retard or accelerate the rate of assimilation. It also aims at overcoming some of the limitations of past studies and integrating the main findings into a social-psychological conceptual framework.

All situations involving culture contact have certain features in common. As Kroeber has stated,

There is no difference of principle between the acculturation involved in the Hellenization of the Romans in Italy during the two or three centuries following 270 B.C. and that of the Americanization of Italians in the United States following A.D. 1850.²

But in order to make suggestions that have policy implications, it is first necessary to have some facts that are based on precise definitions and sound methodology. At present, unfortunately, such data are very scanty.

For the purpose of this study, acculturation is defined as the process of becoming more "American-like." Taking the Hungarian refugee as an example, acculturation is conceived of as a process whereby an individual moves from an ideal typical Hungarian pole of a theoretical continuum toward an ideal typical American pole. The process can be measured in terms of changing behavior patterns, personality factors, attitudes and values.

Two measures of acculturation were used. 1) The Campisi Scale,³ which is a test measuring the degree to which a person of foreign background has internalized certain aspects of the American way of life as well as the degree to which he has retained some aspects of the way of life of his home country. This test measures interpersonal associations, English or Hungarian language usages, food habits, desire to acculturate and national

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1. Paul J. Campisi, "A Scale for the Measurement of Acculturation," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1947.

2. A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1948, p. 427.

3. Campisi, *op. cit.*

identifications. The test was originally developed by comparing the responses of three different ethnic groups. 2) An Information Scale was developed as an additional measure of acculturation in order to meet some possible criticisms of the Campisi Scale. As a self-rating device, the Campisi Scale is vulnerable to the objection that the respondent could distort his answers in the direction judged by him to be socially desirable. For this reason it was decided to include as an additional measure of acculturation a test designed to assess the amount and nature of information possessed by the respondent regarding marginal aspects of American culture. This test was suggested by some World War II movies where a person who spoke faultless English was suspected of being a German spy. In order to ascertain his true identity he was interrogated on such aspects of American culture as,

How many men play on a baseball team? Who is Satchmo? What does it mean to be on the ball?

There was found to be a significant relationship between the Information and the Campisi scales, and the two were combined into a single measure of acculturation.

The problem of selective sampling was met in the following manner. In 1956, after the Hungarian Revolution, Cornell University Medical College selected a group of refugees for the purpose of a study dealing with health problems.⁴ These individuals were selected as being representative of the escapee population of 1956. Two years later, the author traced these people to the various parts of the United States where they had settled. The majority of them, those who lived in the Eastern part of the United States, were included in this study. The respondents of the study, therefore, ranged widely with respect to the degree of acculturation.

One of the main tasks was to account for differences between people representing the extremes in our distribution. In brief, what makes some people assimilate more quickly than others? From the available literature on acculturation we derived a large number of testable hypotheses. In addition, other personality scales were employed which measured such dimensions as "acquiescence," "authoritarianism,"⁵ and "Machiavellianism" (a test for cynicism based on the writings of Machiavelli).⁶ Finally, information was also obtained on such value

orientations as acquisitiveness, patriotism, and achievement orientation.

The findings present an interesting portrait of the highly acculturated immigrant. The more successful immigrant is likely to be Protestant or Jewish, of middle-class background in Hungary. He had at least a gymnasium education and often attended a professional school. The highly acculturated refugee was far from having been a failure under communism. On the contrary, those who were more successful under the communist regime are more likely to be in the more acculturated group in the United States. The same type of individual is successful in both societies because of basic similarities for certain dominant values of the two social systems. These dominant value systems are characteristic of many highly industrialized societies.

It is not surprising that the most acculturated immigrants in the United States are found in the professional and the highest prestige groups. Such a person seems to be centrally concerned with achievement, acquisition, and personal enjoyment. He appears to be an ambitious, highly cynical person, but not especially authoritarian.

One of the most consistent findings of this and past acculturation studies has been that persons who hold a high occupational status or show upward occupational mobility are those who, at the same time, are most rapidly and easily acculturated within the new society. The crucial question is what theoretical framework can be utilized to explain this consistent finding.

In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to state some basic definitions. All behavior relevant to the purposes of this discussion takes place within a social system. *Status* is a position within the social system involving certain rights and duties. *Role* refers to behavior oriented to the patterned expectations of others. As Merton has emphasized, each social status consists of not only a single associated role but an array of roles, i.e., the status teacher involves not only the role of educator vis-à-vis his pupils, but also an array of other roles relating to his school board, principal, colleagues, parent-teachers association, etc. This whole array of roles is called a *role-set*.⁷ To this set of concepts the idea of role elements is added. *Role elements* may be described as the entire configuration of specific behavior patterns expected of the holder of a given status by the members of the role-set, not only those by which the role is defined. For example, the status of a school teacher implies not only role expectations specifically pedagogical in nature but also numerous expectations peripheral to pedagogy as such, but nonetheless an integral part of the role definition. For example, his pupils will not only expect the teacher to teach, but will also expect him to wear shoes, to speak good English, to maintain discipline, etc. The total inventory of these expectations is designated as role elements.

4. L. E. Hinkle, Jr., "Motivations of Individuals Who Took Part in the Uprising," *The Hungarian Revolution of October 1956*, Second Seminar, Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, New York, 1958.

5. R. Christie, J. Havel, and B. Seidenberg, "Is the F Scale Irreversible?" *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1958, LVI, 143-159.

6. R. Christie, Personal communication, and R. Christie, and R. K. Merton, "Procedure for the Sociological Study of the Value Climate of Medical Schools," in Anonymous, *The Ecology of the Medical Student*, Association of American Medical Colleges, Evanston, 1958, p. 125-153.

7. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (2nd edition), The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1957, pp. 368-384.

Occupations, of course, can be ranked according to prestige.⁸ It is suggested that the higher the rank of an occupation on the prestige scale the more numerous will be the inventory of role elements associated with that occupational status. For example, if one has the job of floor sweeper in a large skyscraper, he will have only a few requirements from members of his role set in regard to that position with correspondingly fewer and vaguer demands made on him as to mode of dress, manner of speech, and *general* qualities of personality. For the position of an executive in a large corporation, on the other hand, a much larger number of elements will be expected. It is common acceptance that for an executive position the candidate's wife, mode of dress, manner of speech, place of residence (all role elements) are considered relevant to the occupational status of an executive.

Individuals belonging to the higher occupational statuses have needs and motivations that can become satisfied by becoming successful occupationally. Role elements constituting expectations for high status positions are defined, in our study, on American models. It follows, then, that the more numerous and rigorous are the role elements to be fulfilled in a given occupation, the more acculturated to American ways will be the expected behavior.

The study confirmed this expectation. Individuals who are more acculturated are indeed those who are more achievement motivated. The more acculturated refugees also have a relatively strong acquisitive value orientation. They are the ones who have to satisfy these needs in order to either acquire or maintain a high occupational status. Concurrently, in acquiring and maintaining such a status, they have acquired the largest number of American traits, in this case in the form of high number of role elements, i.e., they have become most acculturated. Those refugees who were of the lower prestige occupation in Hungary show lower achievement motivation, lower acquisitive values, and consequently have found niches in lower prestige occupations in the United States and through having relatively fewer role elements associated with their occupations have shown very little acculturation. A porter, for example, has to be able to meet some

physical requirements in order to carry on his job. His employers, however, are unlikely to be concerned as to how he spends his leisure time, or the type of school his children attend. This is not meant to imply that people who fill the lower prestige jobs behave randomly, but that their occupation demands a smaller commitment of their life space to American patterns and, therefore, they tend to base their behavior on traditional patterns or on personal attachments. As these respondents show a somewhat lower achievement motivation and less preoccupation with acquisition, they are less concerned with making the "right" ties, but make those that are gratifying to them on other grounds. It was found, in further support of this line of reasoning, that these respondents are more apt to speak Hungarian at home, join an ethnic church and social club, and maintain friendship with other refugees, and correspondingly to acculturate as little as possible.

In this study, we demonstrated the importance of high achievement motivation and acquisitive value orientation for acculturating to the United States. This effect has, of course, been conditioned by the degree of "openness" to social mobility of the American occupational structure. However, irrespective of the opportunity structure, we know that if an ethnic group is low on achievement and acquisitive value orientations (e.g., the Puerto Ricans), it is not likely to be upwardly mobile or to acculturate much.

A number of practical implications can be drawn from this study, for those interested in facilitating acculturation. In order to assure ease of acculturation of an immigrant group it is, for example, important to insure access to higher status occupations with numerous required role elements. Another possibility is to increase the number of role elements for some lower status positions. Thus, it might be required that a janitor learn more than a minimal knowledge of English or that he attend to such other cultural elements as his children's education. Perhaps, the best method of maximizing immigrant acculturation is to reorient the practice of selective immigration through governmental policy. One would perhaps give less emphasis to the global ethnic characteristics and give more attention to the selection of individuals manifesting high achievement and acquisitive value orientations and possessing transferable occupational skills with numerous role elements.

8. P. K. Hatt, and C. C. North, "Jobs and Occupations: A Popular Evaluation," *Opinion News*, 1957, IX, 3-13.